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# Youth'ful revival of avanaddha vadhyas

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AT a time when the 'drums' of the world are uniting to form a fusion rhythm by absorbing the layas cultures of various countries, our own *avanaddha vadhyas* (percussion instruments) grouped as *pushkla* and *sushpakka vadhyas* (major and minor) have been clamouring for recognition, some perhaps, even struggling to survive.

Thanks to the efforts of Percussive Arts Centre of Bangalore and some energetic and enthusiastic percussion *vidwans* like Karaikudi Mani, T.H. Vinayakram (Vikku) and others, instruments which would have gone into oblivion and become museum pieces, have survived. They are alive in percussion ensembles and are making headway in seeking a legitimate place in the concert forum. And one is happy that Konnakkol (oral recitation of solfus), morsing, cholu, geturvadhyam have all got a new lease of life. Tala Vadhya Cutcheri, as the percussion ensemble is generally known as, has come to stay.

In this context, Vadya Laya Vrinda of Bombay founded by Ambalapuzha T.S. Nandakumar stands out for the 'teen-age' ensemble that it is formed of, (student-artistes in the age group of 10-19 years), but displaying professional poise in performance. With a musical lineage tracing from the ambalapuzha Brothers, Nandakumar has instinctively taken to the percussion stream groomed as he is by Kathavana Madhava Das. Besides being an amiable accompanist he has shown his flair for teaching — training many students in a number of music institutions. Not content with just training, he has found an exposure medium too for the students to hone their skills and play in unison.

Vadya Laya Vrinda, Nandakumar's brainchild, is a composite unit drawn from teen-aged talents. The artistes are all, save Konnokkol, basically trained in mridangam but given training also in thavil ghatam, kanjira etc. for ensemble purpose. Under his disciplined tutelage, the ensemble has been performing with exemplary synchrony and individual excellence.

Having performed all over the city and in the South, the Vadya Laya Vrinda has come out with two audio cassettes entitled Jewels of Rhythm (part 1 and 2), the first released last year and the second

Listening to the cassettes, one is touched by the youngsters instant rapport with their medium and with their co-participants, which results in establishing rapport with listeners too. The opening strains of Hamsadhwani on the violin (by Vanmali Dikshit) invoking *Mooladhara Moorthy*, serves as a sweet melodic plank for the teenagers to go on an *Adi Tala* trek with skeins of rhythmic intricacies (Jewel 1). Opener Vidya makes an impressive start with her Konna kol, reciting the intricate sollus with exquisite ease.

Of the three mridangists, the youngst Vijay Natesan is a child prodigy, who brims with energy and enthusiasm and plays with alacrity and artistry. Vivek Rajagopal, for his age, displays quiet grace, playing even the intricate passages with *sarvalaghu* ease.

N. Chidambaram, an IIT student, is the stalwart of the team. Shaping as a mature artiste, he strives for polish and poise. Creditable that Nandakumar has toned the heavy tons of the thavil to suit ensembles played by Kumar. And Sriram's Kanjira and Prasad Nair's ghatam speak for their versatility. The ensemble is complete with morsing played by Gopalan. The players entering rhythmic *mohera* and *korvai* frays in turns and joining up for a grand finale, is a crowning effort.

Follows a *misra chapu thani* after just the *pallavi* of *kriti*, *Kailasanathana* tagged on with *swaraprastharas*. The *sinayasa* that dominates leaving the *kriti* to a truncated strip, moves on to more intricate plane. If *Tisra Nadai* makes a lilting composition in itself, the *Khandam* on mridangam with the others lending 'Arudi trimes', the sweeps into *Misram* capped with *Sankiranam* makes the jewel sparkle.

No doubt the *sinyasa* has an impact. However a point to be noted here is whether one could take liberty with a great piece of a *kriti*. If time or space is a constraint, a simple tune could have been substituted, as they do in Hindustani music — a *lekera*; rather than clipping a grand piece of a *kriti* which does not go with tradition.

The jewel in the crown of rhythm is however the *Bhairavi Ata Tala Varnam* in the second cassette. The grand, lustrous piece that had been subjected to innovated in fine streamlined two *tempi* (slow and fast), interspersed with *tisram* making it a grand-slam presentation. It stood as a class by itself. Kudos to the guru and the *chelas* for their *sadhaka* and *sadhana*. In this, mention must be made of the violinist Madhavan and Sitaria Janardhan, both of whom have played with equal poise. *Nagumomu* (Abheri) highlighted the youngsters' accompanying proficiency.

The concluding *Ragam Tanam Pallavi* in Kalyani and Adi (technically *(Chatura Triputa) Khanda Gati* was a major number well dressed up with all rhythmic frills, in an odd paced cycle with odd take off, giving enough exercise to the skill of the players and intelligence of the listeners.

A worthy addition to your cassette library